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SUBJECT: ROK EXPERT CLAIMS CHINA WON'T OBSTRUCT DPRK ENDGAME

REF: A. SHENYANG 183
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Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The intellectual godfather of the ROK's current DPRK policy, Professor Nam Joo-hong, told us that in the event of a DPRK collapse China would not stand in the way of the ROK's efforts to unify the Korean Peninsula. Nam claims senior PRC intelligence officials have told him that Chinese intervention in a second Korean conflict would not be in Beijing's long-term strategic interest. Beijing had concluded that Premier Wen Jiabao's recent Pyongyang visit failed to persuade the North to return to Six-Party Talks, according to Nam. Chinese foreign policy experts increasingly viewed the DPRK as a threat to China's security. Nam asserted that if a power vacuum were to arise in Pyongyang, fighting could erupt between DPRK military factions and the ROK army could be forced to intervene. The ROK aim would be to establish order and allow for a period of peaceful coexistence with a Seoul-friendly regime to foster better conditions for eventual unification. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Nam's account of his PRC interlocutors, views were significantly more negative on the Wen visit than the Chinese embassy here, which continues to portray it as a pivotal event that will help get the Six-Party Talks back on track. We also note that in the event of instability in the DPRK, there would be numerous ways for China to influence events without necessarily engaging in military conflict with the United States, a point Nam seems to ignore. Realistic or not, however, in the event of instability in the DPRK, Nam,s would be a powerful voice in ROK deliberations over how to respond. End Comment.

The Ruling Party's DPRK Policy Guru

[1](#)3. (C) Dr. Nam Joo-hong, the architect of the Lee Myung-bak administration's North Korea policy and President Lee's first nominee to become Unification Minister, met with poloff on October 20 to discuss ROKG thinking regarding DPRK endgame scenarios. Arrogant and thoughtful, Nam was a KCIA Deputy Director responsible for North Korea during the Kim Young-sam administration, a member of LMB's transition team and interim head of the ROK National Intelligence Service during the transition. During his lengthy tenure in the KCIA, Nam met with DPRK counterparts on many occasions and developed extensive contacts with Chinese officials. Nam's book,

"There's No Unification," makes the case that unification is a critically important but even more daunting strategic national goal, and is central to the conservative ruling party's foreign policy canon. The book seeks to dispel notions that unification would be anything but a long slog. Nam is currently a political science professor at Kyonggi University. He withdrew his nomination for Unification Minister in the wake of allegations of improper real estate speculation and media criticism that his hawkish views were not a good fit for the ministry charged with engaging the North.

China Knows DPRK Not Worth Fighting For

14. (C) Nam asserted Beijing had concluded that its strategic interests would not be served by engaging in armed conflict over the ultimate fate of North Korea. As a result of extensive dialogue with a range of senior PRC intelligence officials, Nam was confident that the Hu-Wen-Zeng leadership troika had already decided that coming to North Korea's defense in a conflict with U.S.-ROK allied forces would in no way serve China's long-term interests. Why would China put at risk its long-term prospects for expanding economic and political relations with the ROK, the U.S. and Japan, Nam asked. Or to put it another way, he posited, "a buffer state at what cost?"

15. (C) Nam said the political leadership in Beijing was Western-oriented and pragmatic in its view of Northeast Asia politics. China's efforts to achieve superpower status involved a strategy toward Korea he referred to as "do gangyang haeng," or "crossing the river to cross the ocean." Nam explained that solid long-term relations with the ROK were important to China for economic and trade reasons, but also facilitated the greater goal of managing and expanding relations with the ROK's treaty ally, the United States.

Wen's Pyongyang Trip: A Bust?

16. (C) Nam met with his PRC contacts in Beijing following Premier Wen Jiabao's October 4-6 Pyongyang visit and was told very bluntly that the trip had failed. Nam's Chinese interlocutors lacked confidence that the North would agree to return to the Six-Party Talks and had told him that the question was still a subject of intense debate in Pyongyang. Nam's sources indicated Kim Jong-il had asked the Premier Wen for a "strategic aid package," including crude oil, rice, and coking coal, but was unwilling to make a clear commitment to return to the Six-Party Talks. The leadership in Beijing was "very unhappy with Pyongyang" and many official PRC voices were now openly critical of the regime, some suggesting that the North's nuclear capability could one day be directed against China. Many PRC security experts had concluded that not only was the DPRK no longer an ally, but now posed a real security threat right on China's doorstep, Nam asserted.

DPRK Endgame: Assert Control First, Unify Later

17. (C) In discussing post-DPRK scenarios, Nam was quick to draw a distinction between the ROKG tasks of establishing control of DPRK territory and actual unification, the former being an immediate imperative and the latter a long-term goal. Nam was adamant in his belief that German-style overnight unification would be "suicidal" for both halves of the Peninsula. The cultural divide between the two Germanys was miniscule, compared to the "high, thick wall" that exists between the Koreans, he opined.

18. (C) Nam believed that in the case of a leadership vacuum in the DPRK, violent clashes could easily emerge between military factions that have roots going back as far as the Japanese occupation. Factional violence could constitute a worst-case "sudden change" scenario requiring ROK military intervention to maintain social order. Although he did not go into detail, Nam suggested that between the time of a

first ROK incursion to restore order and a move toward unification, Seoul would seek an extended period of peaceful coexistence with a friendly DPRK regime.

STEPHENS